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First kidnapping suspect arrives in Wells County

By SYDNEY KENT
 What some officials are now referring to as the "leader" of the three suspects charged in the kidnapping of an 11-year-old from Zanesville has arrived in Wells County. Zachary Delozier, 29, South Dakota, arrived at the Wells County Jail at 8:07 p.m. Thursday. He is currently being held without bond. Delozier was charged with kidnapping, a Level 5 felony, after he and two others were

located in a traffic stop in Barneveld, Wisconsin, with the missing child one day after a Silver Alert was issued. Sara Gaudino, 22, and Isaiah Schryvers, 23, also of South Dakota, have not yet arrived in the state to face their charges. However, both suspects have waived extradition and are expected to arrive soon. Sheriff Scott Holliday and Det. Chip Swindell with the Wells County Sheriff's

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Pictured above is Zachary Delozier (front) moments before he was taken into custody at the Wells County Jail. Delozier was led by Detective Chip Swindell. Above left is the van that was used to abduct the 11-year-old child from Zanesville less than two weeks ago. The van will be processed for evidence, according to Sheriff Scott Holliday. (Photos by Sydney Kent)

SWCS board hears from STEM and FFA programs

By HOLLY GASKILL
 Southern Wells' first school board meeting was largely beginning-of-the-year formalities, but the board did take a moment to recognize the successes of the district's STEM and FFA programs. Makayla Bailey, STEM teacher, spoke about her classes with the board, highlighting the ways she's implementing STEM building blocks for elementary students. For example, Bailey has students learn the fundamentals of coding through video game exercises. To support the STEM program, Mary Solada of Paddlefish Solar presented a \$1,000 donation to the program. Paddlefish Solar also donated \$500 worth of general school supplies for the district. Later on, members from the FFA showcased their knowledge of parliamentary procedure, run-

ning through a mock meeting discussing where the members should take a trip. Board member Andrew Pursifull said he had enjoyed seeing the students learn more about the process and was excited to have them back. Given the opportunity to reorganize board leadership, the school board members largely retained their previous leadership and committee appointments. Todd Fiechter will continue as board president, Chad Roush as vice president and Delora Schneider as secretary. Superintendent Trent Lehman



The Southern Wells FFA delivered a presentation of the parliamentary process to the school board during their meeting Thursday evening. Pictured, Kammy Miller stands to voice her thoughts regarding the hypothetical matter at hand, where the group should travel. (Photo by Holly Gaskill)

recommended the board raise their annual stipend to the state's maximum, \$2,000, and the board unanimously agreed to maintain their \$1,500 stipend.

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Park Board on target with 5-year master plan

By JONATHAN SNYDER
 During their first meeting of 2024 on Thursday, the Bluffton Park Board celebrated the success of the department had in its 2023 end-of-year report, as it is on target to complete the objectives they set for their five-year master plan put together in 2022.

"We are really cooking," said Parks Department Superintendent Brandy Fiechter, a sentiment echoed by the board members — Susan Campbell, Christine Zadylak and John Gerber. Rick McEvoy was absent. The objectives in that plan include developing Lancaster Park while extending the Interurban Trail to Lancaster, renovating the Wells Community Swimming Pool House, adding parking to Roush park, resurfacing the basketball courts at Roush and Lion's park, and conducting a stabilization study for Rivergreenway and repairing the trail. Fiechter stated that Lancaster Park's renovations are expected to be completed in August of this year, while the Interurban Trail's

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Adams, Wells agreement on table for engineer

By HOLLY GASKILL
 Adams County has agreed to allow former Wells County engineer Nate Rumschlag to return to Wells once weekly — for a price. The interlocal agreement, approved by Wells County Council Tuesday, outlines a \$1,500 weekly service fee. Rumschlag

left the Wells position for Adams in November and was originally permitted to return one day per week to help with the transition. At the time, there was discussion of working out a more permanent interlocal agreement, however, it appears those hopes have dwindled.

As Council member Todd Mahensmith calculated, this service fee is roughly triple what would've been Rumschlag's previous daily rate. "Yeah, it's Adams County sticking it to us a little bit," Council member Seth Whicker agreed. However, the majority decided it was pivotal to have someone

making progress on ongoing grant applications, especially someone familiar with the projects. Council member Brandon Harnish added that the money saved through these grants should significantly outweigh the money spent in the agreement.

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Senate GOP prioritize literacy, health in five-part agenda

By CASEY SMITH and WHITNEY DOWNARD
Indiana Capital Chronicle
 A bill to require earlier interventions for students struggling with literacy is top-of-list for Indiana Senate Republicans, who unveiled the 2024 agenda Thursday morning. Senate Bill 1, authored by Sen.

Linda Rogers, R-Granger, would require IREAD testing to begin a year earlier, in second grade, and allow those who pass at that stage to be exempt from taking the test again in the future. Students who do not pass must receive targeted support during third grade to help them improve their reading skills. After a full

year of remediation — and three chances to take the IREAD test — lawmakers want schools to retain students who do not pass the test by the end of third grade. Exceptions are carved out for students who have been retained in third grade before, special-education students, certain English language learners, and students

who pass the math portion of the statewide assessment and receive remedial reading instruction. Indiana third graders who fail the statewide reading exam can already be held back, but deciding how to implement the state policy is ultimately left up to schools. Test data show that in 2023, 13,840 third-graders did not pass

IREAD. Of those, 5,503 received an exemption and 8,337 did not. Of those without an exemption, 95 percent moved onto 4th grade while only 412 were retained. Rogers' bill could cause more students to repeat third grade even though the bill's wording is almost identical to existing rules. Leg-

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Outside

 Rain and wind gusts today, snow, high gusts tonight

Today	Saturday	Sunday
High 41	High 26	High 10
Low 21	Low 40	Low 0

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SWCS board

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Lehman later announced Sunday, June 2, as the Class of 2024's commencement exercises.

Other items were:
 • Briann Emshwiler was hired as an elementary special education instructional assistant.

• The board recognized donations from Blackburn Romey, Bluffton Dental Clinic and Family Ford of Bluffton for prom, and Wells Veterans Inc., Family Ford of Bluffton and K&R Gas Services.

• The physics class was permitted to travel to Cedar Point on May 6.

• The following fundraiser requests were approved: the Music Department's fish and chicken dinner April 1-13 and the annual mattress sale Sept. 14.

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Park Board on target

(Continued from Page 1)

estimated completion date is October of 2024.

The department did make a rough discovery with the Roush project, however, as it has an issue with one of its parking lots. Recently, the department was advised that the asphalt for the parking lot was beyond fixing, according to Fiechter. Fiechter added that the department would need to set aside an estimated \$250,000 to fully complete the repairs. No decisions have been made

at this time.

The Pool House is expected to be fully sided in the spring, but Fiechter is still seeking quotes for the flooring and doors of the house. While the Lion's Park basketball court has been resurfaced, Roush's renovations are still ongoing.

In addition, the Rivergreenway study has been completed, and an \$11,235 grant from the Community Enhancement Endowment fund will provide some of the funding necessary for

bank erosion repairs.

Additionally, the board reported that there were over 2,400 hours of volunteer hours for the department, while over 26,500 different participants took part in last year's programs.

The board also discussed two donations, an unrestricted \$2,500 donation from Steve and Yvette Huggins, and a \$500 donation to Rock Steady Boxing from Arlene Stoller. The board also mentioned that the Land and Water Conversion Fund will be reimbursing over

\$260,000 for the Lancaster Park project.

Furthermore, the board submitted a \$100,000 grant request to Lake and River Enhancement for the riverbank erosion project, while a \$1,000 grant was given to the department from the Wells County Convention and Visitors Commission to advertise the Chilly Chili trail run. An official decision on the LARE grant is expected in the later months of this year.

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Five-part agenda

(Continued from Page 1)

islative staff said that by putting retention language in state law — rather than just an administrative rule, where it's currently housed — schools are expected to comply.

"This is not a retention bill. Retention is the absolute last resort, after we've exhausted all other methods to help struggling student readers," said Sen. Jeff Raatz, R-Richmond, during the Senate GOP agenda release. "There are a lot of good things the General Assembly (wants to provide) to help kids learn to read. We're going to catch them early, and give those who need it extra support so they can be successful."

"When you look at everything we're doing for students in Indiana, it's all hands on deck to make sure that kids can read by the time they finish third grade," he continued.

The priority measure is a response to Indiana's dismal literacy rates. The latest reading scores showed that one in five Hoosier third graders failed state-standardized IREAD testing and continue to struggle with foundational reading skills.

An answer to Indiana's literacy 'crisis'

Indiana's existing third grade reading policy was adopted in 2012 by the State Board of Education. The administrative rule mandates that kids who fail the third-grade literacy test should be held back. Exemptions exist for students in special education, certain English language learners and students who have already been retained twice or more.

The retention provision in Rogers' bill mirrors that of the current rule but adds a new exception for students who pass the ILEARN math exam in third grade. Indiana Department of Education data indicates there were 583 such students in 2023.

The GOP-backed legislation additionally mandates summer school to be offered to students who are not reading proficient in third grade — or are at-risk second graders behind in literacy. Language in the bill

does not require students to actually attend or participate in summer school, however.

Indiana Secretary of Education Katie Jenner and Gov. Eric Holcomb said earlier this week they want required IREAD testing in second grade, too. Doing so could help teachers and parents better identify struggling students and implement additional support before kids get too far behind, Jenner said.

Holcomb's goal is that 95 percent of students in third grade can read proficiently by 2027.

Jenner has repeatedly emphasized the need for more literacy catch-up to take place over the summer.

Funding for summer school — equal to about \$18.6 million per year under the current state budget — is mostly going toward students taking physical education and health courses in the summer. Jenner said the state should now shift the focus of summer school to reading.

Rogers' bill answers that call, requiring the State Board of Education to adopt rules that will change the distribution formula to prioritize reading-focused summer school programming for second and third graders.

And although Jenner, Holcomb and Republican state legislative leaders have said before that high rates of absenteeism are likely contributing to the state's dismal literacy rates, policy to address student attendance and chronic absenteeism is not included in their agendas.

The latest Indiana data shows that about 40 percent of students statewide missed 10 or more school days last year, and nearly one in five were "chronically absent" for at least 18 days.

Senate Pro Tem Rodric Bray, R-Martinville, said Indiana already has "a pretty decent system" for dealing with chronic absences, and said parents, schools and law enforcement need to weigh in on potential new approaches to absenteeism and truancy.

Still, he said the issue is "super important," and promised "a full vetting this

year to try and get something done."

Other priorities for child care, health

Outside of education, Senate Republicans also targeted regulations in the child care industry they claim are hampering accessibility.

Much of the bill's contents are recommendations from an interim committee, said author Sen. Ed Charbonneau, R-Valparaiso, such as establishing pilot "micro-facilities" and lowering the minimum age for child care workers.

However, the bill will only prioritize recommendations that don't have a price tag.

"2024 is not a budget year. But do we sit around and do nothing because we have no money? No," Charbonneau said. "This gives us an opportunity to kind of dive in and look at the issues that normally we might not look at because we have money."

Another measure to reduce government regulations, fines and fees comes from Sen. Chris Garten, R-Charlestown. Senate Bill 4 sets up an ongoing review process of unused state government funds and allow agencies to cut their fines or fees through an internal process.

Garten estimated that the bill could recoup roughly \$40 million in its first review cycle, with over half of that money earmarked for the Medicaid reserve account to make up for a \$1 billion budget shortfall and the remainder going into the General Fund for spending in 2025.

Sen. Eric Koch, R-Bedford, painted his bill on lead service lines as a health issue, saying that utilities had encountered unresponsive property owners when trying to replace lead pipes — which degrade over time, leech into the drinking water and cause serious health issues. Senate Bill 5, he said, would ease the process for utilities addressing Indiana's more than 265,000 remaining lead pipes and passed the Senate utilities committee Thursday morning.

The last priority bill would be a significant

reform to prior authorization, an insurance process that requires prior approval for a medical service or procedure before an insurer commits to covering it.

Sen. Tyler Johnson, an emergency physician, said the practice is burdensome to health care providers and leads to delays in care that could be deadly. In a 2022 survey of members from the American Medical Association, 33 percent of physicians reported delayed care due to prior authorizations and estimated they spent 14 hours weekly dealing with the process.

"Unfortunately, there's often not much common sense in that whole process. At the end of the day, the people who are affected most are Hoosier patients because prior (authorization) slows down or even stops their ability to get care," Johnson said.

He credited portions of the bills focus to a ProPublica investigation on the use of artificial intelligence and algorithms by insurers to deny prior authorizations, even as insurers relied on expertise from doctors in unrelated specialties to review claims.

His bill would require insurers use physicians in the same specialties to review prior authorizations while also eliminating the practice altogether for emergency services, routine care and common prescription drugs.

"We would also set a cap on overall prior (authorizations) so the insurer can require prior (authorizations) for no more than 1 percent of providers and 1 percent of a given service," Johnson said. "The original idea of prior (authorization) was to prevent waste, fraud and abuse ... in reality, we already have mechanisms through the state to look for fraud."

Senate Bill 3 faces a tough road ahead and will likely be amended. Efforts to address prior authorization last year changed several times during the legislative session but Johnson's bill goes further than previous attempts.

Weather

Friday, January 12, 2024

(24-hour observations at 9:45 p.m. Thursday)
High: 35; **Low:** 30; **Precipitation:** None
Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 3.75 feet at 8:45 p.m. Thursday

Wells County forecast

Today: Rain, mainly after 9 a.m. High near 41. Breezy, with an east wind 15 to 25 mph, with gusts as high as 35 mph. Chance of precipitation is 100 percent. New precipitation amounts between three quarters and one inch possible.

Tonight: Snow, possibly mixed with rain, becoming all snow after 11 p.m. Patchy blowing snow after 10 p.m. Low around 21. Windy, with a southwest wind 30 to 35 mph, with gusts as high as 50 mph. Chance of precipitation is 100 percent. New snow accumulation of less than one inch possible.

Saturday: A 40 percent chance of snow showers. Patchy blowing snow. Cloudy, with a high near 26. Windy, with a west wind 25 to 35 mph, with gusts as high as 50 mph.

Saturday Night: A 20 percent chance of snow showers before 1 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 5. Breezy, with a west wind 20 to 25 mph, with gusts as high as 40 mph.

Sunday: Partly sunny and cold, with a high near 10. Breezy.

Sunday Night: A 20 percent chance of snow showers after 1 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 0.

M.L.King Day: Mostly cloudy and cold, with a high near 11.

Monday Night: A 20 percent chance of snow showers after 1 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 1.

Tuesday: A 20 percent chance of snow showers. Partly sunny and cold, with a high near 7.

Tuesday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 0.

Wednesday: Partly sunny and cold, with a high near 19.

Kidnapping

(Continued from Page 1)

Department drove together on the 16-hour roundtrip to pick up both Delozier and the van that was allegedly used in the abduction. Upon first look, the van appeared dirty and unkempt.

Delozier does not have a date set for his initial hearing in the Wells Circuit Court at the time of print.

All three suspects face up to six years incarcerated for a Level 5 felony for kidnapping.

It is not yet clear if further charges will be added as the investigation unfolds.

The News Banner will continue to follow these cases.

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Engineer

(Continued from Page 1)

"Even though it's a little bit of a hard pill to swallow, do I have a motion to approve?" asked Whicker.

The interlocal agreement was approved 6-1 by the council; Whicker and council members Vicki Andrews, Scott Elzey, Harnish, Brian Lambert and Steve Huggins, who attended the meeting via Zoom, voted in favor, and Mahnensmith voted

against. The agreement will not take effect until approved by the County Commissioners, whose next regular meeting is 5 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 16.

The agreement is not to exceed 90 days but permits renewal as needed. In the meantime, the county engineer position has also recently been posted on the county's website.

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U.S. inflation picks up, though some costs rise only mildly

WASHINGTON (AP) — Higher energy and housing prices boosted overall U.S. inflation in December, a sign that the Federal Reserve's drive to slow inflation to its 2 percent target will likely remain a bumpy one.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that overall prices rose 0.3 percent from November and 3.4 percent from 12 months earlier. Those gains exceeded the previous 0.1 percent monthly rise and the 3.1 percent annual inflation in November and were slightly above economists' forecasts.

More than half the increase in prices from November to December reflected higher housing costs. Energy costs, along with food prices, also contributed to inflation.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, though, so-called core prices rose just 0.3 percent month over month, unchanged from November's increase. Core prices were

up 3.9 percent from a year earlier — the mildest such pace since May 2021. Economists pay particular attention to core prices because, by excluding costs that typically jump around from month to month, they're seen as a better guide to the likely path of inflation.

Inflation has cooled more or less steadily since hitting 9.1 percent in mid-2022. Still, despite the slowdown in price increases, along with steady economic growth, low unemployment and healthy hiring, polls show many Americans are dissatisfied with the economy.

That disconnect, a likely issue in the 2024 elections, has puzzled economists and political analysts. A major factor is the lingering financial and psychological effects of the worst bout of inflation in four decades. Much of the public remains exasperated by higher prices. Prices are still 17 percent higher than they were before the inflation surge began and are still rising.

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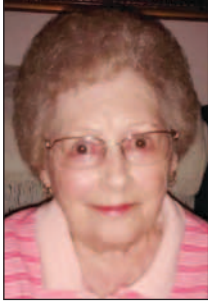
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OBITUARIES

Donna Leas, 93

Donna J. Leas, 93, of Jackson Township in Wells County, passed away at Parkview Huntington Hospital on Jan. 10, 2024.



Donna was born on Aug. 7, 1930, to Eli and Stella (Newhouse) Booher. She graduated from Jackson Township in 1947, and married James "Jim" Leas on Nov. 21, 1951. He preceded her in death on June 12, 2010.

Donna worked from 1969 to 1975 as an aid at Heritage Pointe in Warren. She then stayed home and watched her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Donna enjoyed watching her shows, General Hospital, Reba, Game Shows and the Food Network. She was very dedicated to her hair appointments. Donna loved to go fishing with Jim, her flowers and humming birds, and mostly, spending time with her family.

Donna was also preceded in death by her parents, siblings, Arvin, Cleo, Nell, Blanche, Olive and Norma, and daughter, Cathy Leas.

Loving survivors include her daughter, Connie (Rex) Jennings of Warren; grandchildren, Eric (Consuela) Tyner of Lolo, Mont., Aaron (Jessica) Tyner of Warren, and Jeremy (Courtney) Farr of Warren; six great-grandchildren, 11 step-great-grandchildren, two great-great-grandchildren and two step-great-great-grandchildren.

Friends and family may gather to share and remember from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 13, 2024, at Glancy-H. Brown & Son Funeral Home, 203 N Matilda St. in Warren.

A funeral service will begin at 1 p.m. with Pastor Troy Drayer officiating. A private burial will be held at Asbury Cemetery.

Those wishing to honor Donna's memory may consider making donations to Locks of Love or the American Cancer Society.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Glancy-H. Brown & Son Funeral Home in Warren.

Margaret Whitesel, 85

Margaret Roselin (Sample) Whitesel, 85, of Carmel, passed away Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2024, at her son's residence.



She was born on April 18, 1938, in Fort Wayne to the late Leonard G. Sample and Arnola A. (Tudor) Sample.

Margaret was a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Ossian.

She lived in Wabash, and was a graduate of Lagro High School and Indiana Business College. She was employed in 1970 with Moorman Manufacturing Company in Urbana, transferring to Moorman's/ADM in Bluffton in 1977, and retired in December of 1999. She then became employed at the Wells County Council on Aging as an Administrative Assistant for 11 years, retiring in October 2013.

She enjoyed spending time with family and friends, running, bicycling, walking, traveling, gardening and reading.

Margaret is survived by her daughter, Jane Anne Garner of Huntington; son, Christopher A. (Terry) Whitesel of Carmel; son, Ronald D. (Christina) Whitesel of Decatur; five grandchildren, Aaron (Kerri) Garner, Megan (Chris) Lenhart, Zachary (Megan) Whitesel, Jacob (Amie) Whitesel and Danielle (Collin) Campbell; two step-grandchildren, Amber Riedlinger and Julian Schott; eight great-grandchildren, Levi Garner, Ashlyn Garner, Alexandra Lenhart, Isaac Lenhart, Oliver Lenhart, Sophia Campbell, Theodore Campbell and Elijah Campbell; three step-great-grandchildren, Marcus Ebersole, Kiya Schott, Emeri Schott; and a sister, Shirley (Jim) Paul of Wabash.

In addition to her parents, she also was preceded in death by two brothers, Leonard R. Sample and Philip G. Sample.

A funeral service will be held at 11 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 19, 2024, at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Ossian with Pastor Samuel Wirgau officiating. Burial will follow at Bethlehem Lutheran Cemetery in Ossian.

Friends and family will be received from 4-7 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024, at Zwick & Jahn Funeral Home in Decatur and one hour prior to services at the church on Friday.

Preferred memorials are to Bethlehem Lutheran Church or Bethlehem Lutheran School.

Arrangements are by Zwick and Jahn Funeral Homes of Decatur.

Evelyn J. Brewer, 94

Evelyn J. Brewer, 94, died Thursday afternoon, Jan. 11, 2024, at Kingston Residence of Fort Wayne, following an extended illness.

Arrangements are pending with Goodwin - Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel 3220 East SR 124 Bluffton, IN

SWES announces honor roll for second quarter

Southern Wells Elementary School has released the names of its students on the high honor roll and honor roll for the second term of the 2023-24 school year.

2nd Grade High Honor Roll

Preston Barnes, Rhett Bower, Bristol Fiechter, Selah Fisher, Riggs Frauhiger, Austin Hamilton, Wesson Laurence, Khushi Patel, Callen Paxson, Grant Penrod, Charlotte Pursiful, Cohan Stevens, Eli Swartz, Aubrey VanGordon, LaRose Wengerd, Jaelyn Wickey and Amelia Wilburn.

Honor Roll

Nery Benavidez, Rhider Bennett, Brynnley Caldwell, Lucille Cameron, Chloe Carnes, Finley Emerick, Ty Frauhiger, Matthew Gabriel, Koda Gibbons, Cierra Hamilton, Courtney Hastings, Emmalyn Higgins, Ansleigh James, Paisley Jenkins, Gavin Jennings, Brooklynn Kinnett, Madison Malott, Alexis Nusbaumer, Kelbi Richardson, Dorothy Rockwell, Mason Schwartz, Jack Slusher, Mackenzie Townsend, Titus Truex, Brant Tucker and Hannah Wyatt.

3rd Grade High Honor Roll

Jalynn Bibserstine, Joseph Bricker, Danelia Brown, Matthew Butcher, Addison Cassiday, Ava Fiechter, Jacob Hoffacker, Sadie Johnson, Eva Laurence, Colton Michael, Gretchen Prible, Oliver Roberts, Hayden Slusher, Brantley Steffen and Scarlett Zaklikiewicz.

Honor Roll

Jace Andrews, Brantley Barnard, Zoey Boyer, Andrew Compton, Grey-

son Dressler, Avery Durbin, Kaitlyn Edmonds, Jackson Felger, Gabriel Gardner, Jet Gilbert, Aaylah Guhl, Drayah Hicks, Cambrie Higgins, Addison Hormann, Kynsleie Huffman, Emma James, Charlie Kahn, Emerson Leas, Amy Mills, Rissa Morris, Avery Neuenschwander, Andre Neuenschwander, Jaxson Nusbaumer, Waylon Paul, Kayne Raymond, Bella Rogers, Graceyn Schortgen, Braxleigh Sunderman and Jade Zigler.

4th Grade High Honor Roll

Emmabelle Baumgartner, Adrian Boxell, AnnaLynn Felger, Royal Frauhiger, Katy Goodnight, Annie Herr, Kayci Needler, Lindsay Penrod, Naomi Shirar, Talia Smith, Liam Thompson, Lily Townsend, Trace Tucker and Tucker Wellman.

Honor Roll

Sutton Bennett, Jaxson Billman, Carter Blinn, Blakely Bower, Caroline Brown, Maya Campbell, Colton Coons, Makenna Dowell, Mason Edmonds, Case Hamilton, Quinn Harker, Wyatt Hicks, Granger Higgins, Cash Jenkins, Layne Koroncevicius, Aiden Lemons, Harper Mann, Cooper McNally, Parker Michael, Bronc Miller, Raven Mounsey, Noah Neuenschwander, Joseph Nusbaumer, Eliza Peterson, Miley Shippy, Kipton Sleppy, Peyton Slusher, Kerrigan Stevens, LaKota Todd, Tucker Trospen, Levi VanDeman, Jasmine Walker, Brayden Wickey and Lexi Zavattaro.

5th Grade High Honor Roll

Raelin Bower, Braelyn Boyer,

Sophia Kahn, Elise Schneider, Blakey Schortgen and Ethan Swartz.

Honor Roll

Kole Allred, Hunter Baumgartner, Reagan Bennett, Gavin Biberstine, Kaden Boxell, Selic Bradley, Jaycee Carroll, Keeton Carroll, Paisley Chandler, Traesyn Dixon, Elaina Edwards, Charlene Felger, Cash Frauhiger, Cora Freiburger, Zane Gates, Oliva Hoffacker, Ryan Jeckert, Karla Martinez, Anna McFarren, Allie Miller, Stanley Needler, Tyler Nichols, Vada Palmer, Cooper Reeves, Titus Robles, Alex Schwartz, Layla Shelley, McKenzie Striker, Alexis Sunderman, Charlie Thurman and Samantha Zavattaro.

6th Grade High Honor Roll

Josiah Bricker, Levi Dunnuck, Tenley Fiechter, McKynleigh Flowers, Elsa Franks, Alex Gaskill, Liam Leas, Trinity McClennen, Ellie Nichols, Holly Pearson, Harper Reynolds, Rhett Tucker, Isaac VanDeman and Abigail Zaklikiewicz.

Honor Roll

Rowen Bennett, Ella Bertsch, Charlie Billman, Lillyx Brenner, Parker Bryant, Parker Carroll, Marcus Denny, Ryker Engle, Randy Frauhiger, Ryder Gearheart, Josie Goodnight, Mia Green, Rowyn Hartley, Evelyn Hartman, Miracle Hastings, Leland Heath, Gage Heckman, Collin Hormann, Hazel Leas, Kegan Leas, Morgan Meyer, Emree Mounsey, Aubree Neuenschwander, Elijah Paxson, Carly Pease, Reese Prible, Landon Quickery, Tiffany Smith and Weston Zigler.

Police Notebook

INCIDENTS

City:

Tuesday, 2:53 p.m., 700 block of South Morgan Street. Report of fraud.

Tuesday, 3:47 p.m., West Market and North Oak streets. Extremely patient caller reported road was blocked at railroad tracks for over 25 minutes.

Tuesday, 8:34 p.m., Budget Inn. Report of harassment.

Wednesday, 12:13 a.m., 400 block of West South Street. Report of an attempted breaking and entering.

Wednesday, 10:40 a.m., 400 block of West Ohio Street. DCS requested officer assistance.

Wednesday, 7:22 p.m., Villa North Mall. Report of vehicle parked in area. Caller said they found it suspicious. Driver was a food delivery person, no issues.

Wednesday, 8:31 p.m., West Madison Avenue and North William Wells Circle. Caller reported semi-truck parked incorrectly. Semi moved.

Wednesday, 9:19 p.m., Bluffton Police Department. Caller reported subject threatening at their resi-

dence.

County:

Wednesday, 1:25 p.m., 900 East 100 South, Bluffton. Report of an injured raccoon in traffic. Officer put raccoon down.

Wednesday, 3:28 p.m., Wells County Jail. Officer transported subject to the Wells County Jail without incident.

Wednesday, 6:23 p.m., 5900 North Miller Street, Uniondale. Report of a domestic altercation.

Wednesday, 7:48 p.m., 5900 North Miller Street, Uniondale. Caller reported issues with administering medication.

Wednesday, 11:26 p.m., 4500 East 550 South, Bluffton. Caller reported a vehicle pulling into driveway multiple times. Subjects were looking for dog.

Thursday, 7:39 a.m., South 450 West and Ind. 218, Poneto. Car versus deer.

Thursday, 7:54 a.m., 300 West and West 500 South, Bluffton. Driver cited for speeding 70 in a 55 mph zone.

Ossian:

Thursday, 1:08 a.m., North Jefferson Street and

Davis Road. Officer pulled over vehicle without license plate. Alyssa Jenae Helbert arrested for operating while intoxicated and possession of marijuana and paraphernalia.

ARRESTS

Alyssa Jenae Helbert, 25,

Fort Wayne, possession of marijuana, a Class B misdemeanor, possession of paraphernalia, operating with a controlled substance in body, and operating a vehicle while intoxicated, all Class C misdemeanors. Bond set at \$2,000.

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Friends of the Shelter

Above are the 2024 officers of the Friends of the Shelter, the group that supports the Wells County Animal Shelter. Pictured is (front) Treasurer Tammy Schaffer, President Mary Martin, (back) Secretary Erin Schantz, Vice President Vicki Grace and Recording Secretary Tammy King. (Photo submitted)

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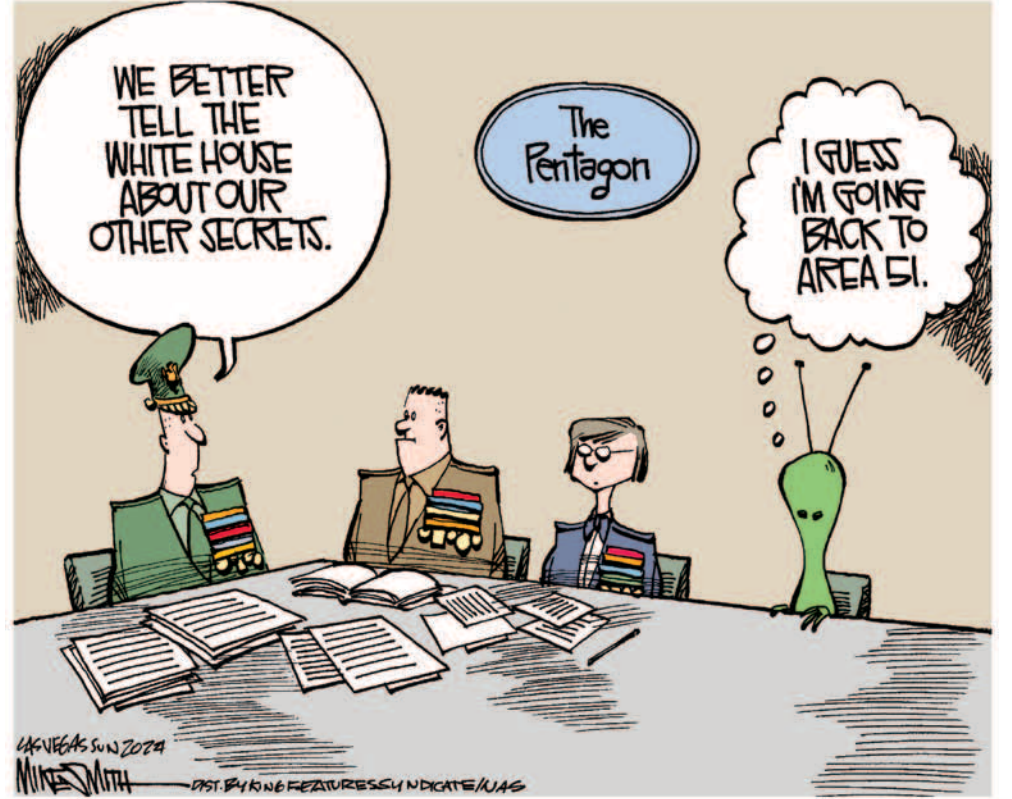
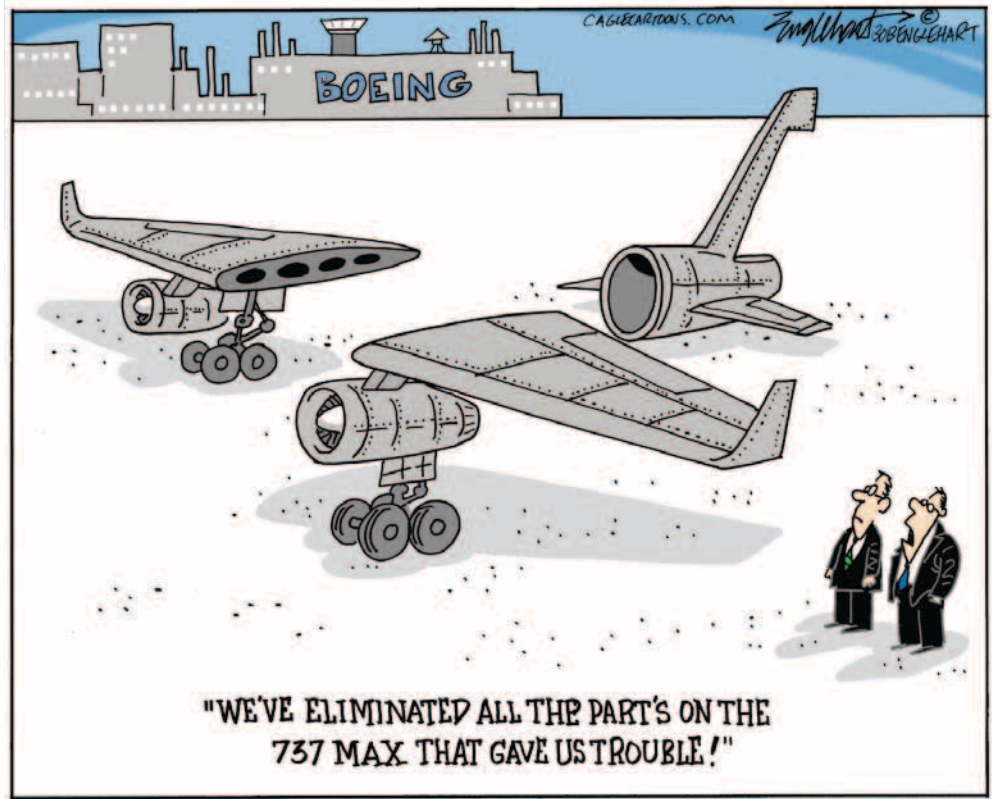
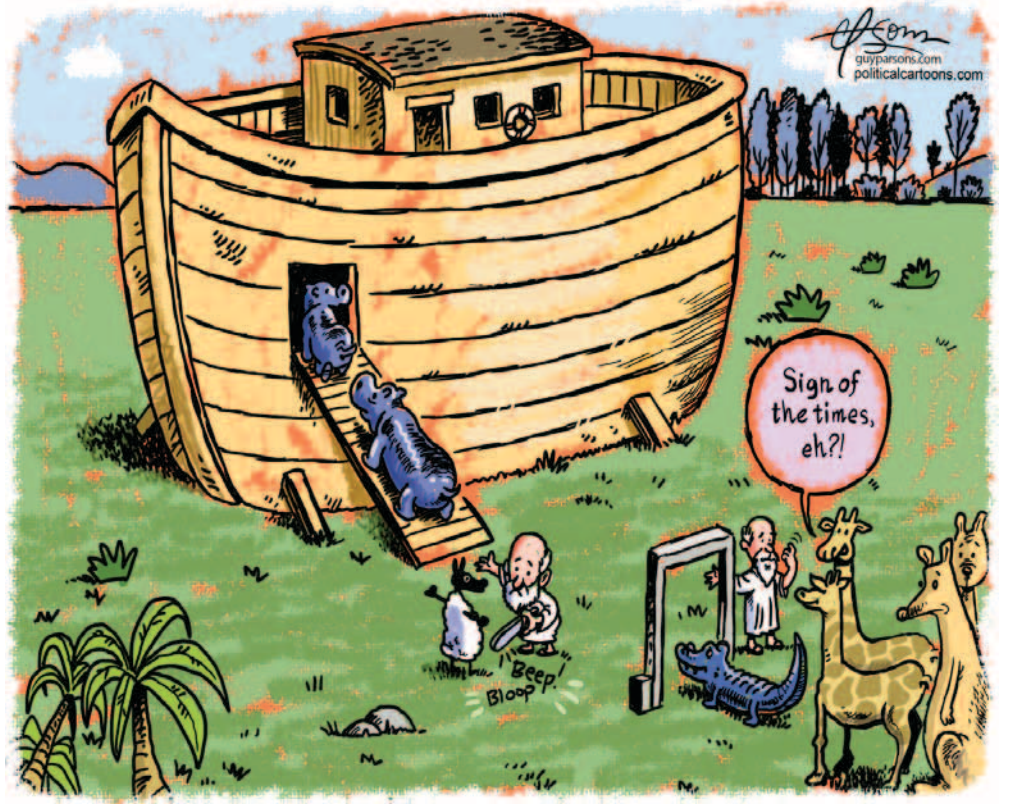
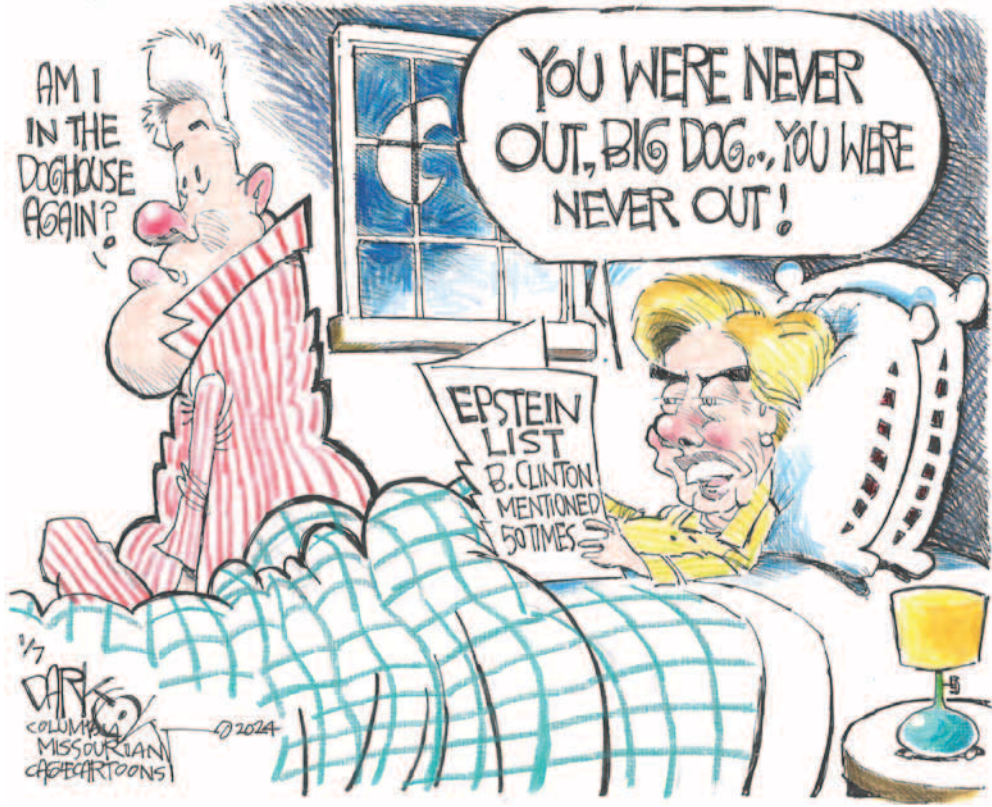
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The Week That Was - a look back through cartoonists' eyes...



Other Opinions

Most recent jobs report has mixed messages

It's an election year, so every economic report is going to be filtered through the lens of political benefit. President Biden thus celebrated the recent Labor Department report that employers added a solid 216,000 jobs in December, but below the top line there are signs of a softening labor market. The question is whether government spending can sustain the job growth amid a weakening economy and business investment.

The unemployment rate last month held steady at 3.7%, but the labor force participation rate (62.5) and employment to population ratio (60.1) both fell by an unusually large 0.3 percentage points.

This was owing to a disconnect between the strong payroll survey and the very weak household survey. The latter reported a decline in employment of 683,000 from November and is 317,000 lower than in August. Most of this decline reflects a shrinking labor force. The two surveys sometimes contradict each other in any single month, but they usually come back into sync over time.

The gains in the payroll survey were also revised down by 71,000 for October and November, which means the net gain was 145,000. Government, health-care and social assistance also made up more than half of December's new jobs. While job growth in most industries has slowed this year, government added an average of 56,000 jobs per month—more than double the average 23,000 monthly gain in 2022.

Average hourly earnings last month increased 0.4% for all private workers and 0.3% for production-level workers. It's good news that wages are finally outpacing inflation, but the bad news is that more Americans are working only part-time. Full-time employment declined 1.5 million last month, while 762,000 more workers were employed part-time.

What this all suggests for the economy is that growth is slowing but a recession isn't in sight. The Atlanta Federal Reserve is predicting that the economy grew 2.5% in the fourth quarter powered mostly by consumer spending, but business investment continues to be cautious. Government social-welfare spending can boost employment for a time, but these jobs don't make people wealthier by improving productivity or living standards.

Federal government spending was \$164 billion higher during the first two months of this fiscal year compared to the prior one, which means the deficit this year could top last year's \$2 trillion. Washington is spending more, but private employers are adding fewer jobs. That isn't a recipe for long-term prosperity.

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Opinions expressed on this page do not necessarily represent the views of this newspaper.

Trump co-defendant alleges Georgia prosecutor corruption

At this stage of things, most of the developments in the criminal cases against former President Trump involve this appeal or that appeal, or this hearing date or that hearing date. But in Fulton County, Georgia, where the elected Democratic district attorney, Fani Willis, has brought a massive RICO case against Trump and 18 other defendants, something truly wild is happening.

One of the defendants in the case, a man named Michael Roman, who worked on the Trump 2020 campaign, has filed a motion to dismiss the charges against him. Roman alleges that Willis abused her authority by appointing her boyfriend, Nathan Wade, to be the special prosecutor in the Trump case, then paid Wade an excessive amount, and then Wade used some of that money to pay for vacations and other high living together with Willis.

Roman wants the charges against him dropped because, he alleges, Willis did not complete the formal process required to appoint Wade special prosecutor in the first place. Roman also wants Willis removed from the case “on the grounds that the district attorney and the special prosecutor have been engaged in an improper, clandestine personal relationship during the pendency of this case, which has resulted in the special prosecutor, and, in turn, the district attorney, profiting significantly from this prosecution at the expense of taxpayers.”

Roman's motion does not present a full range of evidence to support the allegations. Some of the evidence is in publicly available records. As for the rest, Roman's lawyer says she has seen the proof and has some of it in her possession — more on that later.

Roman alleges that Wade does not have the experience for the job Willis gave him. “The special prosecutor has never tried a felony RICO case,” the motion says. More than that: The motion goes on to note that Roman's lawyers have been “unable to find any history of Wade ever having prosecuted a single felony trial.” The motion says there are many lawyers in Georgia who specialize in trying and defending RICO cases, but Wade is not one of them; in fact, the motion alleges, Wade “would not be qualified under Fulton County's standards to be appointed to represent any defendant in this case given the complexity of the charges.”

Nevertheless, Willis chose Wade. Why? “Willis and Wade were romantically involved prior to Willis awarding a contract for legal services with Wade,” the motion says. “Willis and Wade have traveled personally together to such places as Napa Valley, California, Florida, and the Caribbean, and Wade has purchased tickets for both of them to travel on both the Norwegian and Royal Caribbean cruise lines. Wade has also purchased hotel rooms for personal trips with funds from the same account used to receive payments under his contract with Willis.”

The motion adds that “The district attorney and the special prosecutor have been seen in private together

in and about the Atlanta area and believed to have co-habited in some form or fashion at a location owned by neither of them.” That sounds a little mysterious, and the motion does not say who owned the property in question.

Wade has done very well financially working on his alleged girlfriend's case against Trump. “As of December 2023, Wade has been paid a total of \$653,881, which does not include all of his billing to date and does not include the amounts paid to his law firm through his partners,” the motion says. In contrast, Willis' total salary is \$198,266 per year.

The motion says that Wade was married to another woman at the time this was going on. It says Wade filed for divorce at virtually the same moment he signed on to the Willis prosecution, and then immediately moved for his divorce records to be sealed. But the motion says that the order to seal the records, like the effort to hire Wade initially, did not follow proper procedures. Defendant Roman's attorney, Ashleigh Merchant, explained in a fascinating footnote:

“This order appears to have been signed as a ‘consent’ order sealing the record and the required hearing was not held prior to this order being entered. Therefore, the order is void and, if requested by any third party, should be unsealed by the court. However, without knowing the record had been sealed and prior to the court clerk actually sealing the record, undersigned counsel [Merchant] was able to view this record and obtain copies of certain documents that had been filed upon review of the file at the clerk's office.”

So it is appears that is how Roman's legal team found out some of the information about the Willis-Wade relationship. When public figures are involved, divorces can sometimes be the source of interesting information. This time, it's information concerning one of the most consequential prosecutions in U.S. history.

One more thing. Various exhibits attached to the motion contain copies of invoices Wade sent to Willis' office. They list what Wade did during the hours for which he was requesting payment. Two entries are of particular interest. There is one billing note for “Conf with White House Counsel” on May 23, 2022, and another for “Interview with DC/White House” on Nov. 18, 2022. Given the intensely political nature of the Trump case, any evidence of Biden White House involvement will be of great interest.

That is the latest on the Georgia prosecution. If true, it's a pretty sordid story. But given Roman's request — that prosecutor Willis be removed from the case — it could be much more than that.

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Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner



Byron York

Today in History

By The Associated Press
Today is Friday, Jan. 12, the 12th day of 2024. There are 354 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Jan. 12, 1959, Berry Gordy Jr. founded Motown Records (originally Tamla Records) in Detroit.

On this date:
In 1828, the United States and Mexico signed a Treaty of Limits defining the boundary between the

two countries to be the same as the one established by an 1819 treaty between the U.S. and Spain.

In 1910, at a White House dinner hosted by President William Howard Taft, Baroness Rosen, wife of the Russian ambassador, caused a stir by requesting and smoking a cigarette — it was, apparently, the first time a woman had smoked openly during a public function in the executive mansion. (Some of the other women pres-

ent who had brought their own cigarettes began lighting up in turn.)

In 1915, the House of Representatives rejected, 204-174, a proposed constitutional amendment to give women nationwide the right to vote.

In 1932, Hattie W. Caraway became the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate after initially being appointed to serve out the remainder of the term of her late husband, Thaddeus.

The need for personal responsibility

Dear Annie: This letter is a message to "Fed Up," the reader whose husband dotes on their daughters. She needs to know that her husband, as well-meaning as he is, is NOT doing your daughters any favors. I know this all too well by example. My mother never learned to be independent. From her earliest childhood, my grandparents took care of my mother and father: Paying for their mortgage, bailing them out when they got into monetary trouble because of my father, and so much more.

Grandma continued this practice after my Grandpa passed, until the day she passed away. I was informed by Grandma, who I loved dearly, on my 16th birthday, that she expected me to grow up and fill her shoes. I was expected to take care of my mother, as she knew very well that my mother wasn't capable of it.

I quietly refused and moved several hundred miles away. Upon Grandma's passing, I was shocked to learn that she had gone through six figures in money taking care of my mother. My mother did inherit a little money from Grandma, had my father's pension and her own Social Security and other tiny incomes — enough that, if she were careful, she could have lived comfortably to the end. Instead, she spent it on cruises, trips and other expensive things.

In the end, she passed utterly penniless; her home was foreclosed upon because she ignored the property taxes that Grandma had always paid, and she neglected to have things repaired in the house that needed repairing. When she was evicted, she had no heat and no hot water.

Is this an extreme case? Likely, but it is also what could happen if "Fed Up's" husband doesn't make his "little girls" grow up. Show him my letter and ask him this: What will happen to them when you and I are gone? — Saw It Before

Dear Saw It Before: Thank you for your letter. You give some stark examples of what can happen when you give and give without teaching your children personal responsibility.

Dear Annie: I'm very much in love with a man three years younger than me, and we are getting married in February. We are both in our 60s. He is an incredible man. His wife of 32 years died four years ago, and I've been widowed for 10 years.

My issue is that he still has pictures of his wife with him on vacation, on cruises and sports events, and a huge portrait of them that hangs in the den.

Am I being crazy? This bothers me a little, but I don't know how to approach him about it. He placed a picture of the two of us right next to a picture of him with his late wife. I own my own house, and he owns his house, and the plan is for me to move into his house. Should I let this go? It is absolutely the only thing that gets to me about our relationship. Help! — A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Dear Picture: His wife of 32 years is a part of what made him special — the person you love. At the same time, it is not fair to you to be reminded all the time about his late wife. I would let him know your feelings. Perhaps, as you move in, you could agree to have one photo of you and your late husband and one photo of him and his late wife, along with photos of the two of you.

The other photos can be saved in boxes and albums, so you will both have them to see whenever you want, but neither of you will be forced to focus on the past. You did not mention children. If there are photos of his late wife with their children or of your late husband with your children, then you might agree on a compromise for displaying them — or giving them to the children.

He sounds like a very reasonable man, and if you have this conversation before you are married, my guess is that he will understand. Congrats on finding true love.

"How Can I Forgive My Cheating Partner?" features favorite columns on marriage, infidelity, communication and reconciliation. It is available as a paperback and e-book. Visit http://www.creatorspublishing.com for more information. Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com.

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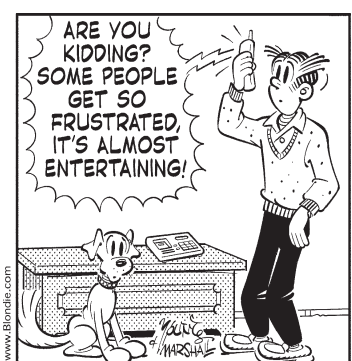
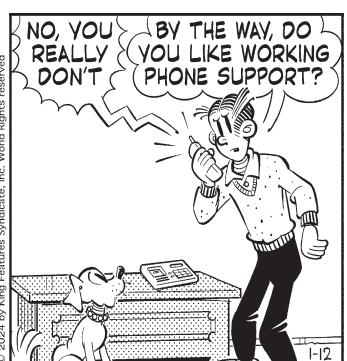
Dear Annie by Annie Lane



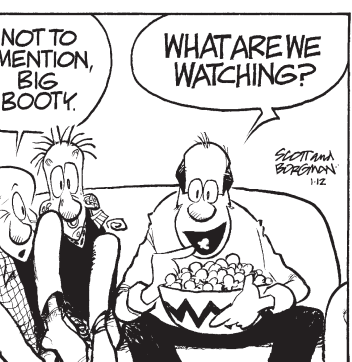
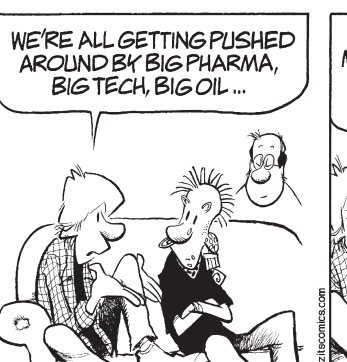
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The LOCKHORNS



My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



The devil knows the Word of God is powerful

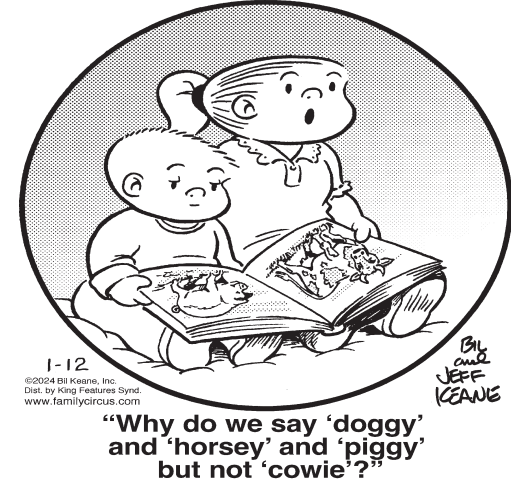
Q: I'm a high school student with an assignment to read and write a paper on the bestselling book (which my teacher claims is a Harry Potter book). When I began my research, I learned that the Bible is still the bestselling book of all time (even in the King James Version), and I've borrowed my title from a blog "The Bestselling Book No One is Reading." The teacher said if I submit my paper on this topic I will get a failing grade, but I really don't care. My paper will still be the truth. How can so many people disbelieve the Bible and it still be "the" bestseller? — B.B.

A: The devil knows the Word of God is powerful, and he'll try to keep people from it and make them doubt it is indeed God's truth. It's been said, "The Bible does not have to be rewritten, but reread." No other book can touch the Bible's profound wisdom or the accuracy of its history and prophecy. Its critics, who claimed it to be filled with forgery, fiction, and unfulfilled promises, are finding that the difficulties lie with themselves and not the Bible. Greater and more careful scholarship has shown that apparent contradictions were caused by incorrect translations rather than divine inconsistencies. It was man and not the Bible needing correction.

The Bible that has given consolation, comfort, and salvation to millions in centuries past is still unlike the books of mankind, for it does not get out of date. The Bible is the textbook of revelation. In God's great classroom is the textbook named Scripture — the revelation of God — and it will stand the onslaught of any enemy. Grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ, and every one of His righteous rules endures forever (see John 1:17, Psalm 119:160).

(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.)

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Tigersharks split with Squires

Bluffton split in the swimming doubleheader at Manchester Thursday night. The boys won 141-35, while the girls fell 109-56.

Individual winners:

Boys

- Noah Brooks, Ashton Arnett, Anthony Hartman and Isaac Wheeler in the 200-yard medley relay.
- Dalton Rodgers in the 200-yard freestyle.
- Wheeler in the 200-yard IM and in the 100-yard butterfly.
- Wes Frettinger in the 50-yard freestyle.
- Elija Robles in the diving events and in the 100-yard breaststroke.

- Brooks in the 100-yard freestyle and in the 100-yard backstroke.
- Griffin Linderwell in the 500-yard freestyle.
- Linderwel, Rodgers, Robles and Athan King in the 200-yard freestyle relay.
- Wheeler, Rhet Gerber, Linderwell and Brooks in the 400-yard freestyle relay.

Girls

- Anna Zurcher, Lucia Corkwell, Ellie Coyne and Kierstynn Reed in the 200-yard medley relay.
- Coyne in the 200-yard freestyle.
- Zurcher in the 200-yard IM.

Bluffton will host Wayne at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 18.

BHMS hoops goes 3-1 in hoops

Bluffton-Harrison won three out of four at Northfield in middle school basketball Thursday night.

The eighth grade boys won 34-20 and improved to 9-6 on the season. Gavin Grieser was the top-scorer with 13 points, followed by Rafe Gerber (8), Dawson Lee and Bennett Stoller (3), Gibby Grieser, Parker Banres and Cooper Jenkins (2) and Reid Abbett (1).

The eighth grade girls' team lost 24-22. Kamryn Ault led the way with seven points, followed by Grace Fry and Khloe Dick (6), Cora Kunkel (2) and Ava

Trexler (1).

The seventh grade boys won 37-26 and improved to a perfect 15-0 record. Chase Kistler led the Tigers with 19 points and 11 rebounds, Maddox White and Vince Lambert (5), Kamdyn Shuman, Parker Christal, Pierce Renner and Wyatt Holmes (2).

The seventh grade girls won in overtime 37-32. Audrey Mechling and Averie Patton led the team with 10 points each, followed by Josie Nash (8), Madeline Morgan (5) and Gracie Jellison (4).

Patriots' 'partnership' with Bill Belichick comes to an end after 24 seasons, 6 Super Bowl titles

By KYLE HIGHTOWER and JIMMY GOLEN

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — Bill Belichick had a vision of building the kind of sustained championship football team that had rarely been seen before in the NFL when he was hired by the New England Patriots.



Bill Belichick

He walks away feeling like it was a job well done.

The six-time NFL champion agreed to depart as the coach of the Patriots, ending his 24-year tenure as the architect of the most decorated dynasty of the league's Super Bowl era.

"It's with so many fond memories and thoughts that I think about the Patriots," Belichick said on Thursday in a media availability with owner Robert Kraft. "I'll always be a Patriot. I look forward to coming back here. But at this time, we're going to move on. And I look forward, excited for the future."

Neither Belichick nor Kraft took questions, though Kraft said during an availability later in the day that the team missing the playoffs in three of the past four seasons factored into wanting to sever their relationship.

"What's gone on here the last three to four years isn't what we want. So we have a responsibility to do what we can to fix it to the best of our ability," Kraft said.

Speaking to reporters from the podium where he had given so many terse, non-responsive postgame recaps, Belichick appeared in a jacket and tie and spoke first, followed by Kraft. The coach even smiled a couple of times — including when he conceded respect for the media "even though we don't always see eye to eye."

He also thanked the fans for "the send-offs, the parades, the Sundays." But most of his time was spent thanking the people throughout the organization, especially the more than 1,000 Patriots players he coached in his time here.

"Players win games in the NFL," Belichick said. "I've been very, very fortunate to coach some of the greatest players to ever play the game."

Kraft called the relationship a marriage that had required work and had come to an end.

"I'm very proud that our partnership lasted for 24 years," Kraft said. "Bill has taught me a lot over those years, and we had

high expectations for what we could achieve together. I think we were the only ones who had those expectations, and I think it's safe to say we exceeded them."

"We did," Belichick agreed. "Thanks to you," Kraft said.

Belichick, 71, became just the third coach in NFL history to reach 300 career regular-season victories earlier this season, joining Hall of Famers Don Shula and George Halas. With 333 wins

including the playoffs, Belichick trails only Shula (347) for the record for victories by a coach.

But the Patriots ended this season 4-13, Belichick's worst record in 29 seasons as an NFL head coach. It supplanted the 5-11 mark he managed in his last year in Cleveland in 1995 and again in his first year in New England in 2000. Including the playoffs, he ends his Patriots tenure with a 333-178 record.

Belichick is expected to resume his pursuit of Shula's record elsewhere. Kraft alluded to that, saying complete closure for their relationship couldn't come "while he's still coaching."

"But I hope when that's all over, we can do something that properly honors him and respects him for what he's done with us," Kraft said.

With his cutoff hoodies and ever-present scowl, Belichick teamed with quarterback Tom Brady to lead the Patriots to six Super Bowl victories, nine AFC titles and 17 division championships in 19 years. During a less successful — but also tumultuous — stint with the original Cleveland Browns, Belichick earned 37 of his career victories.

Reaction to Thursday's announcement poured in across social media. It included one from Brady, who responded with three heart emojis to a post on ESPN's Instagram page that had photos of Belichick and Kraft embracing.

It's not immediately clear who Kraft will tap to replace the future Hall of Famer, and he declined to get into particulars out of respect for Thursday's announcement.

"We'll have a chance to talk about that in the very near future," Kraft said.

But asked later what kind of coach he'll seek, he added: "We're looking for someone who can help us get back to the playoffs and win."

NCAA suspends Florida State with NIL-related recruiting violation

By RALPH D. RUSSO
AP College Football Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — A Florida State assistant coach has been suspended for the first three games of the 2024 season for violating recruiting rules by connecting a potential transfer with a representative from a collective during an official visit, the NCAA announced on Thursday.

The NCAA did not name the coach in its release, but a person with direct knowledge of the case confirmed to The Associated Press that it was offensive coordinator Alex Atkins. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because neither the NCAA nor the school was identifying Atkins as the coach involved.

The case involved two Level II infractions and was

resolved as part of a negotiated resolution between NCAA enforcement staff and Florida State, approved by the Committee on Infractions.

Florida State agreed to two years of probation, the loss of a total of five football scholarships over the next two seasons and other restrictions on recruiting, including a reduction of official visits. The school was also fined \$5,000.

The NCAA said the coach facilitated contact between the player and a booster in April 2022. The booster encouraged the player to enroll at Florida State and offered him an NIL opportunity with the collective worth about \$15,000 per month.

The person told AP the player involved was offensive tackle Amarius Mims

from Georgia. Mims entered the transfer portal, but ended up returning to Georgia. He recently announced he was entering the NFL draft as an underclassman.

The NCAA said the assistant coach then gave false or misleading information about his involvement in the arranged meeting to investigators, violating ethical conduct rules.

Atkins was given a two-year show cause order by the NCAA and had recruiting restrictions placed upon him by the school last year.

The university also must disassociate with the booster and the NIL collective.

Florida State said the NCAA acknowledged no findings of responsibility by head coach Mike Norvell and the COI affirmed Norvell "promotes an atmosphere of compliance."

Pitcher Shane Bieber avoids arbitration with Guardians

By TOM WITHERS
AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — Shane Bieber and the Cleveland Guardians have avoided salary arbitration by agreeing to a \$13,125,000 contract for next season, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement had not been announced.

Teams and players were set to exchange proposed arbitration salaries later Thursday.

Bieber, who was limited to 21 starts last season because of an elbow injury, finalized his deal ahead of the deadline, said the person who spoke on condition of anonymity because the team has not announced any agreements.

Bieber made \$10.1 million last season. The 28-year-old Bieber has been the subject of trade speculation the past two seasons, and the right-hander may have been moved last year had he not gotten hurt.

While he's been their staff ace for several seasons, the Guardians know they probably can't afford to sign Bieber to a long-term deal, which is they've considered trading him before he's eligible for free agency.

The AL Cy Young Award winner in 2020, Bieber went 6-6 in 2023 with a 3.80 ERA. In six years with Cleveland, he's 60-32 with a 3.27 ERA and has been an All-Star twice.

The Guardians have six other arbitration eligible players: first baseman Josh Naylor, starter Triston McKenzie and relievers Scott Barlow, James Karinchak, Sam Hentges and Nick Sandlin.

Browns CB Denzel Ward listed as questionable after injuring knee

By TOM WITHERS
AP Sports Writer

BEREA, Ohio (AP) — Browns Pro Bowl cornerback Denzel Ward injured his knee in practice on Thursday and is questionable for Cleveland's wild-card game on Saturday against the Houston Texans and rookie quarterback C.J. Stroud.

The extent of Ward's injury is not immediately known, but if he's less than 100 percent it will further stress a Browns secondary already missing its starting safeties.

Browns coach Kevin Stefanski didn't offer many details about Ward's injury, which occurred after the period open to reporters was over. Stefanski said Ward was limited, but didn't specify how he got hurt.

Ward was selected to his third Pro Bowl this season, his sixth with Cleveland, and has had a major role for the Browns' top-rat-

ed defense, which is No. 1 against the pass.

His injury is just the latest for the Browns (11-6), who have spent the season dealing with major injuries and have had to lean on their backups since the opener. Ward missed three recent games with a shoulder injury.

The timing of Ward's injury couldn't be worse for the team as the Browns get ready to face the impressive Stroud. The No. 2 overall pick in last year's draft missed Cleveland's 36-22 win over Houston on Dec. 24 with a concussion.

Stroud passed for 4,108 yards during the regular season with 23 touchdown passes and just five interceptions despite throwing 499 passes.

Stefanski said safety Grant Delpit, who returned to practice this week after being sidelined four games with a groin injury, will not play against the Texans. Safety Juan Thornhill (calf) is also questionable.

High School Calendar

FRIDAY, JAN 12
BOYS BASKETBALL: Norwell at Belmont, 7:30 p.m.; Bluffton at Heritage, 7:30 p.m. (approx.)
GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bluffton vs. Woodlan (at Heritage), 6 p.m.
SATURDAY, JAN 13
GIRLS BASKETBALL: Belmont at Norwell, 7:45 p.m.
SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): NE8 Meet at Norwell, 10 a.m.
WRESTLING: Norwell, Southern Wells at Garrett Invitational, 9 a.m.
MONDAY, JAN 15
No events scheduled.
TUESDAY, JAN 16
BOYS BASKETBALL: Southern Wells at

Adams Central, 7:30 p.m.
SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): Huntingdon North at Norwell, 5:30 p.m.
WEDNESDAY, JAN 17
WRESTLING: Norwell at South Adams, 6:30 p.m.
THURSDAY, JAN 18
GIRLS BASKETBALL: Eastbrook at Bluffton, 7:30 p.m.
SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): Oak Hill at Norwell, 5:30 p.m.; Wayne at Bluffton, 5:30 p.m.
FRIDAY, JAN 19
BOYS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at Adams Central, 7:30 p.m.
GIRLS BASKETBALL: Norwell at New Haven, 6 p.m. (no JV)



Haas F1 drops Steiner as the team principal

By JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Guenther Steiner, the first employee hired by Haas F1 and one of the stars of the Netflix docuseries on Formula One, has not been retained as team principal after a decade with the series' only American team.

Gene Haas made the announcement Wednesday and said director of engineering Ayao Komatsu, who started with Haas as chief race engineer in its 2016 debut season, will now oversee the competition elements as team principal.

Haas said Komatsu will be responsible for overall strategy and on-track performance. Haas also plans to hire a European-based chief operating officer to manage non-competition matters from the team factory in Banbury, England.

Haas in a statement thanked Steiner "for all his hard work over the past decade" but was short of praise for the man who built the Haas F1 team.

"Moving forward as an organization it was clear we need to improve our on-track performances. In appointing Ayao Komatsu as team principal we fundamentally have engineering at the heart of our management," Haas said.

"We have had some successes, but we need to be consistent in delivering results that help us reach our wider goals as an organization. We need to be efficient with the resources we have but improving our design and engineering capability is key to our success as a team," he continued. "I'm looking forward to working with Ayao and fundamentally ensuring that we maximize our potential — this truly reflects my desire to compete properly in Formula 1."

Haas has never won an F1 race or scored a podium finish. Steiner, who has a nearly 40-year career in motorsports, had guided Haas F1 since the California businessman was granted the team in 2014. Steiner was hired to build the organization, which splits its operations in both Kannapolis alongside the Haas NASCAR operation and the factory in England.

Steiner has been based in North Carolina, where he moved in 2006 to build Red Bull's entry in NASCAR. Steiner left Red Bull in 2008 but remained in Mooresville and founded FibreWorks Composites, a carbon-composites design and manufacturing company that specializes in race-car development.

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News-Banner Scoreboard

BASKETBALL

High School

Thursday Boys' Scores
 Andean 60, Victory Christian Academy 57
 Batesville 56, Greensburg 52
 Bethany Christian 59, South Bend Career Academy 51
 Concord 51, Plymouth 42
 Culver 44, Michigan City Marquette 39
 Elwood 59, GEO 20
 Franklin Co. 39, Hauser 38
 Mishawaka Marian 76, S. Bend 42
 Clay 42
 Mt. Vernon (Fortville) 54, Avon 48
 NorthWood 59, Northridge 57
 Northeastern 78, Union City 41
 S. Bend Ritey 71, New Prairie 45
 Taylor 75, Clinton Central 34
 Tri-County 46, W. Central 35
 W. Lafayette 61, Rensselaer 47
 Clerc Tournament
 First Round
 Indiana Deaf 45, Austin TSD, Texas 35
 Northeast Corner Conference Tournament
 Consolation
 Lakeland 67, Garrett 42
 Prairie Heights 66, Hamilton 34
 W. Noble 65, Churubusco 55
 Semifinal
 Angola 60, Central Noble 52
 Fairfield 58, Westview 46

Thursday Girls' Scores
 Argos 59, Oregon-Davis 34
 Austin 73, N. Harrison 30
 Benton Central 79, N. Judson 33
 Brown Co. 51, Edinburg 36
 Center Grove 64, Columbus North 49
 Chesterton 64, LaPorte 20
 Clay City 56, Bloomfield 45
 Clinton Central 79, Taylor 38
 Dubois 36, Barr-Reeve 31, OT
 Eastern (Greene) 53, Mitchell 32
 Elkhart 72, Bremen 50
 Eminence 58, IMSA 14

Evansville Memorial 66, Castle 58
 Frankton 75, Tipton 14
 Gibson Southern 77, Tecumseh 49
 Glenn 41, S. Bend St. Joseph's 30
 Greensburg 64, Brownstown 37
 Highland 67, Hammond Morton 58
 Indpls Herron 60, Indpls Washington 41
 Indpls Irvington 25, Providence Cristo Rey 10
 Indpls Park Tudor 47, Indpls Scocina 36
 Indpls Pike 81, Decatur Central 52
 Indpls Ritter 54, Indpls Tindley 39
 Indy Brebeuf 47, Bethesda Christian 38
 Kokomo 47, Triton Central 43
 Lake Central 67, Portage 27
 Lapel 54, Shenandoah 30
 Lawrence Central 54, Lawrence North 51
 Madison Shawe 46, Milan 39
 Merrillville 58, Lafayette Harrison 41
 Michigan City Marquette 47, S. Bend Trinity 8
 Monroe Central 62, Muncie Central 29
 Mooresville 44, Bloomington South 37
 N. Decatur 59, Southwestern (Shelby) 15
 N. Knox 83, Shoals 26
 New Prairie 56, S. Bend Riley 24
 Northfield 49, Lakeland Christian 34
 Orleans 44, Borden 40
 Penn 50, Jintown 31
 Princeton 65, Wood Memorial 63
 Rensselaer 68, W. Lafayette 60
 Riverton Parke 35, Crawfordsville 21
 S. Bend Washington 69, S. Bend Adams 27
 S. Decatur 55, Waldron 37
 S. Ripley 51, Rising Sun 44
 Scottsburg 61, Salem 24
 Shakamak 48, N. Vermillion 34
 Sheridan 61, Speedway 42
 Silver Creek 47, Corydon 42
 South Knox 77, N. Daviess 17
 Southridge 39, S. Spencer 34
 Southwestern (Hanover) 41, Switzerland Co. 36

Southwood 49, Peru 36
 Springs Valley 43, Paoli 36
 Tell City 56, Boonville 49
 Tri 60, Richmond 48
 Tri-County 47, Caston 42
 Tri-Township 50, Morgan Twp. 34
 Twin Lakes 65, N. White 22
 University 49, Indpls Shortridge 40
 Vincennes 44, Evansville North 41
 Vincennes Rivet 46, Loogootee 39
 W. Washington 48, Crawford Co. 38
 Wheeler 29, Boone Grove 25
 White River Valley 47, Pike Central 40
 Whiteland 60, Southport 25
 Whitko 68, Lakewood Park 41
 Clerc Tournament
 First Round
 Indiana Deaf 77, Lexington School for the Deaf, N.Y. 6
 Delaware County Tournament
 Semifinal
 Delta 42, Wapahani 40
 Yorktown 44, Wes-Del 8
 Indianapolis City Tournament
 Semifinal
 Indpls Cathedral 39, Covenant Christian 32
 Indpls Chatarel 56, Heritage Christian 45
 Northeast Corner Tournament
 Consolation
 Garrett 40, Westview 34
 Prairie Heights 50, Hamilton 13
 W. Noble 34, Churubusco 31
 Semifinal
 Eastside 52, Angola 49
 Fairfield 47, Lakeland 23

College
Men's Basketball Scores
Thursday, Jan. 11
EAST
 Bryant 77, Binghamton 69
 Maryland 64, Michigan 57
 Vermont 77, UMB 72
SOUTH
 Appalachian St. 70, Coastal Carolina 45
 FAU 85, Tulane 84

FIU 77, New Mexico St. 67
 Georgia St. 77, Old Dominion 70
 James Madison 89, South Alabama 55
 William & Mary 73, Hampton 61
MIDWEST
 Omaha 79, North Dakota 61
 Oral Roberts 84, South Dakota 66
 S. Dakota St. 81, St. Thomas (MN) 80

Women's Basketball Scores
Thursday, Jan. 11
EAST
 Louisville 74, Pittsburg 44
 Vermont 70, UMB 55
SOUTH
 Alabama 81, Georgia 63
 Florida St. 70, North Carolina 62
 Georgia Tech 70, Clemson 62
 James Madison 81, Southern Miss. 76
 LSU 87, Texas A&M 70
 Mississippi 58, Auburn 55
 NC State 93, Virginia 66
 North Alabama 79, Austin Peay 75
 Syracuse 77, Wake Forest 56
 Tennessee 88, Florida 81
 Vanderbilt 95, Kentucky 73
 Virginia Tech 76, Miami 52
MIDWEST
 Green Bay 85, Youngstown St. 47
 Murray St. 75, Indiana St. 63
 Nebraska 56, Illinois 48
 Notre Dame 98, Boston College 48
 Ohio St. 90, Rutgers 55
 S. Indiana 87, SIU-Edwardsville 64
 South Carolina 81, Missouri 57

L.A. Clippers 126, Toronto 120
Thursday's Games
 Cleveland 111, Brooklyn 102
 Milwaukee 135, Boston 102
 Oklahoma City 139, Portland 77
 New York at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.
 Phoenix at L.A. Lakers, 10 p.m.
Friday's Games
 Houston at Detroit, 7:30 p.m.
 Indiana at Atlanta, 7:30 p.m.
 Sacramento at Philadelphia, 7:30 p.m.
 Charlotte at San Antonio, 8 p.m.
 Golden State at Chicago, 8 p.m.
 L.A. Clippers at Memphis, 8 p.m.
 Orlando at Miami, 8 p.m.
 Portland at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
 Toronto at Utah, 9:30 p.m.
 New Orleans at Denver, 10 p.m.

Colorado 3, Vegas 0
Thursday's Games
 Seattle 4, Washington 1
 Buffalo 5, Ottawa 3
 N.Y. Islanders 4, Toronto 3, OT
 San Jose 3, Montreal 2
 Edmonton 3, Detroit 2, OT
 Vancouver 4, Pittsburgh 3, OT
 Carolina 6, Anaheim 3
 Tampa Bay 4, New Jersey 3, OT
 Florida 3, Los Angeles 2, OT
 Winnipeg 2, Chicago 1
 St. Louis 5, N.Y. Rangers 2
 Calgary at Arizona, 9 p.m.
 Boston at Vegas, 10 p.m.
Friday's Games
 Nashville at Dallas, 8 p.m.
 Philadelphia at Minnesota, 8 p.m.

TRANSACTIONS
BASEBALL
Major League Baseball
American League
 CHICAGO WHITE SOX — Named Jin Wong assistant general manager. Agreed to terms with INFs Nicky Lopez and Andrew Vaughn, RHPs Michael Kopech, Michael Soroka and Touki Toussaint and LHP Garrett Crochet on one-year contracts.
 CLEVELAND GUARDIANS — Agreed to terms with RHP Shane Bieber and Triston McKenzie, 1B Josh Naylor and LHP Sam Hentges on one-year contracts.
National League
 CHICAGO CUBS — Agreed to terms with LHP Shota Imanaga on a four-year contract. Acquired INF Michael Busch and RHP Yency Almonte from the Los Angeles Dodgers in exchange for minor league LHP Jackson Ferris and minor league OF Zyrhir Hope. Designated C Brian Serven for assignment.
 CINCINNATI REDS — Agreed to terms with RHPs Tejay Antone and Lucas Sims, OF Jake Fraley, C Tyler Stephenson and LHP Alex Young on one-year contracts.

FOOTBALL

NFL
NFL Playoff Glance
Wild-card Playoffs
Saturday, Jan. 13
 Cleveland at Houston, 4:30 p.m. (NBC/Peacock)
 Miami at Kansas City, 8 p.m. (Peacock)
Sunday, Jan. 14
 Pittsburgh at Buffalo, 1 p.m. (CBS)
 Green Bay at Dallas, 4:30 p.m. (FOX)
 L.A. Rams at Detroit, 8 p.m. (NBC/Peacock)
Monday, Jan. 15
 Philadelphia at Tampa Bay, 8:15 p.m. (ESPN/ABC)

HOCKEY

NHL
Wednesday's Games
 Philadelphia 3, Montreal 2, SO
 Dallas 7, Minnesota 2

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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

King Classic Sudoku

1						2	9	
5	6		7				2	
3		8	9					5
7		6						9
2				7			1	
	4						5	7
					6			
9					5	1		
			8					
								3

Difficulty: ★★★★★ 1/12

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Lottery Numbers

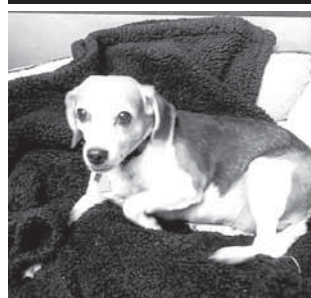
Thursday's Drawings
HOOSIER LOTTERY
 Cash 5 — 02-20-25-26-41
Cash4Life — 24-25-27-32-52, Cash Ball: 03
Quick Draw Midday — 02-05-11-14-23-28-30-32-34-39-42-43-48-49-53-54-60-64-65-73, BE: 53
Daily Three-Midday — 01-05-06, SB: 07
Daily Three-Evening — 08-04-03, SB: 00
Daily Four-Midday — 08-0306-06, SB: 07
Daily Four-Evening — 05-04-03-02, SB: 00
Quick Draw Evening — 07-18-20-22-27-29-40-41-45-49-52-57-59-62-64-65-67-69-70-77, BE: 29
Hoosier Lotto — Estimated jackpot (for Saturday): \$2.8 million
MEGA MILLIONS
 Estimated jackpot (for Friday): \$187 million
POWERBALL
 Estimated jackpot (for Saturday): \$77 million

Public Notices

NOTICE
 The City of Bluffton will receive sealed bids for the construction of sidewalks/curbs and concrete repair. Specifications and Notice to Bidders may be obtained from the Clerk Treasurer's Office, 128 E Market St, Bluffton, IN, 46714, from 8 am to 4:30 pm Mon-Fri. Sealed bids must be returned to the Clerk Treasurer's Office by 4:30p.m on Tuesday, January 30, 2024 to be opened at the Board of Works and Public Safety at 4:30 p.m. on January 30, 2024.
 nb 1/12, 1/19 hspaxlp

STATE OF INDIANA)
) SS:
 COUNTY OF WELLS)
 IN THE WELLS)
 CIRCUIT COURT)
 2023 TERM)
 CAUSE NO.)
 90C01-2312-EU-000058)
 IN THE MATTER OF THE)
 UNSUPERVISED ESTATE OF)
 TOMMIE M. JOHNSON,)
 deceased)
NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION
 Notice is hereby given that Kirsten Scheiman and Kaitlyn Roby, were on December 29, 2023, appointed Co-Personal Representatives of the Estate of Tommie M. Johnson, deceased, who died on November 12, 2023.
 All persons who have claims against this estate, whether or not now due, must file the claim in the office of the Clerk of this Court within three (3) months from the date of the first publication of this notice, or within nine (9) months after the decedent's death, whichever is earlier, or the claims will be forever barred.
 Dated at Bluffton, Indiana, this December 29, 2023.
 Beth Davis
 Clerk, Wells Circuit Court
 Colin Z. Andrews #26767-49
 Andrews & Crell, P.C.
 116 South Main Street
 Bluffton, Indiana 46714
 (260) 824-4049
 Attorney for the Estate
 nb 1/5, 1/12 hspaxlp

NOTICE



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EMPLOYMENT

Help Wanted

WELLS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE is currently seeking applicants for the position of Maintenance/Custodian. Applicants must have general knowledge of heating/cooling, plumbing, electrical with the ability to make minor repairs and/or adjustments. Additional responsibilities include building maintenance and ground keeping. 20-year matrix salary range for the position is \$43,682 - \$52,774. Years of service and experience will be honored for a starting salary up to five years in the pay matrix. Apply at www.wellscountysheriff.com under "Job Opportunities". Deadline for Pre-application submission is no later than February 5, 2024. A full job description is also listed on the website for review.

Help Wanted

THE WELLS COUNTY Prosecutor's Office is looking to hire a person for an Investigator position. The position is a part-time county-paid position making \$21/hour. The investigator would be responsible for conducting criminal investigations and assisting the Prosecutor in preparing cases for trial. The investigator must be an effective communicator, be proficient with a computer, be able to work independently, and have the ability to be on 24-hour call for assistance at crime scenes. Interested persons should go to wellscounty.org/prosecutor/ for a more detailed description of this position. Send any resumes to the Wells County Prosecutor's Office, 102 West Market Street, Suite 405, Bluffton, IN 46714 or submit them by email to prosecutor@wellscounty.org.
SOUTHERN WELLS COMMUNITY School is seeking a second shift custodian. \$20.31 per hour with benefits. Please send a resume of contact rking@swraiders.com

HELOISE HINT: When writing a resume. Never exaggerate or lie about your education and job history. Double-check it when you are done to make certain that it's perfect. Email HELOISE@Heloise.com.

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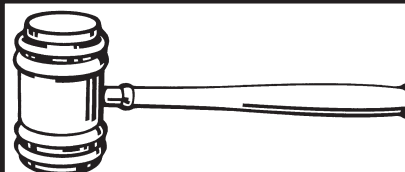
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Need more employees! A 20 word, line classified in the Bluffton News-Banner for a month is \$52. Contact the office at 125 N. Johnson St., 824-0224, or submit on-line at classifieds.news-banner.com.



Public Sale Calendar

JANUARY 12 - 10 a.m. - Secured creditors & various consignors, owners. 815 Adams St., Decatur. Online only truck and equipment auction. Online bidding only. Offering 500+ lots! 2012-2014 Freightliner M2106 box trucks, dump trucks, day cabs, sleepers, utility trucks, bucket trucks, utility & semi trailers, SUV's, pickup trucks, 250+ various skid steer attachments, various truck parts, fencing, work benches, tool boxes and much more! Accepting consignments! **Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC**, 260-724-7402, Kjauction.com.
JANUARY 14-JANUARY 21 - (online only auction) - Various consignors, sellers. 1999 Ford F350 truck with lift bucket, antiques, display cases, advertising memorabilia, jewelry and pocket watches, Fenton and Indiana glass, mid-century modern, industrial quality fans and tools. Preview: Jan. 16th and Thurs. Jan. 18 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 118 East Craig Street, Ossian, IN. **The Steffen Group Inc.**, 260-824-3006, www.steffengrp.com.
BIDDING NOW OPEN AND STARTS CLOSING JANUARY 16 - 10 a.m. EST - Carmel Wellness and secured creditors, owner. Liquidation of Carmel Wellness featuring decompression table w/tension machine, body and therapy tables, hydraulic tables, washer and dryer, folding tables, chairs, desks, office supplies, and much more! Auction pick up Jan. 17, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. **Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC**, 260-724-7402, Kjauction.com.
BIDDING NOW OPEN AND STARTS CLOSING JANUARY 17 - 6 p.m. EST. - Gary Meyer, owner. Online only commercial real estate auction! 1,376 sq. feet building, 2 bay service area, 15'x16' office space, paved parking lot, .46 acre triangle lot located on N. Main Street, (Hwy. 27)! Zoned: Commercial. Year built: 1950. Wabash Township, Section 29, Adams County, Indiana, South Adams School Corp. Auction preview by appointment, 617 N. Main St., Geneva. **Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC**, 260-724-7402, Kjauction.com.
JANUARY 23 - 2-6 p.m. ET - Online - Farm: Susan Dunn Estate. Property Location: Three miles southeast of Markle, IN and Wells Co., Rockcreek Twp. 207.3+/- total acres, high quality farmland, mostly tillable. Tracts 1 & 2: Located on both sides of 200 N between 200 W and 300 W. Tract 3: Located at intersection of 300 N and 500 W. Tract 1: 19.83+/- acres. Tract 2: 110+/- acres. Tract 3: 77.47+/- acres. **Halderman Real Estate & Farm Management**, 800-424-2324, halderman.com, Rick Johnloz, 260-827-8181.
JANUARY 30 - 10 a.m. EDT - Stetzel Farm LLC. Farm machinery retirement auction. Tractors, planters, harvest equipment, tillage, miscellaneous and farm related, trucks and trailers. Timed online. No reserve. Inspection Jan. 20 and Jan. 29 from noon to 4 p.m., 7204 S 200 E, Warren. Contact Mike Stetzel, 260-450-2370, with equipment questions or to set up an inspection appointment. **Merit Auctions**, 833-273-9300, www.meritauctions.com, auction manager: Zach Hiner, 260-437-2771.
JANUARY 30 - 2 p.m.-6 p.m. ET - Online - Farm: Mann Farm. Property Location: Three miles northwest of Craigville, IN; 1/4 mile south of US 224 along 500 E in Lancaster Township, Wells County. 36.75+/- total acres, 34.5+/- tillable, 2.25+/- non-tillable, high quality farmland, Wells Co. Soil Types: Pewamo silt clay loam, Bount Del-Rey silt loam; WAPI: 140.6 bu. corn, 43.8 bu. soybeans. Additional information, drone flight, photos available at halderman.com. **Halderman Real Estate & Farm Management**, 800-424-2324, Rick Johnloz: 260-827-8181, Neal Wolhuter: 260-336-2219.
FEBRUARY 12 - 6 p.m. - Daniel E. Schloss, Elizabeth L. Burchfield (f/k/a Elizabeth L. Schloss), Estate of Meshell L. Schloss. Wells County 4-H Community Center, Bluffton. Online bidding available. 164+/-A offered in 8 Tracts or combination. Productive tillable land, professionally designed and stocked pond, recreational woods, newer tree plantings w/conservation grasses, potential country building sites, Huntington County, Salamonie Township. Inspections Jan. 13, 10a.m.-1p.m., Feb. 5, 3-5p.m., call for private showing. Auction managers: Jerry Ehle, 260-410-1996, Steven C. Coil, 260-446-2037, **Schrader Real Estate and Auction Company, Inc.**, schraderauction.com, 800-451-2709.
FEBRUARY 13 - 6 p.m. ET - Keith L. Gilbert estate. Markle Volunteer Fire Department, 150 W. Sparks St., Markle. Property: From Town of Markle, travel northeast on Marzane Road 4 miles. 67.5+/-A offered in 4 tracts or any combination, Wells County, Union Township. Tract 1: 18+/-A w/16.44+/-A tillable. Tract 2: 9.5+/-A w/7.26+/-A tillable. Tract 3: 20+/-A, mostly tillable. Tract 4: 20+/-A, mostly tillable. All tracts have road access! Online bidding available. Inspection: Jan. 16, 4-6 p.m., Feb. 3, 10 a.m.-noon. Auction manager Al Pfister, 260-760-8922, **Schrader Real Estate and Auction Company, Inc.**, schraderauction.com, 800-451-2709.

SUDOKU ANSWER

8	1	4	7	6	8	2	9	5
5	6	1	9	2	7	3	8	4
9	6	8	1	9	2	1	8	7
9	2	9	6	2	1	8	7	8
7	8	1	8	2	9	9	6	2
6	2	8	9	8	7	9	1	2
2	9	7	9	1	6	8	2	8
1	8	2	8	7	2	6	9	9
8	9	6	2	8	9	7	2	1

Witnesses ask Indiana tax task force to 'do no harm'

Groups spoke for and against sales tax expansion, business personal property tax and more

By **LESLIE BONILLA MUÑOZ**
Indiana Capital Chronicle

Across nearly three hours of testimony on Wednesday, an array of national experts and Hoosiers asked lawmakers to navigate a narrow tightrope in tweaking the state's tax structure.

The business personal property tax, for example, contributes upwards of 50 percent of some Hoosier communities' tax collections, said Accelerate Indiana Municipalities' Campbell Ricci.

Patrick Bennett, a lobbyist representing the Indiana Cast Metals Association, told the task force that tax's 30 percent floor was costing local foundries dearly.

When tax force chair Rep. Travis Holdman, R-Markle, asked Bennett how to address the financial impact of eliminating the tax, he quipped, "I don't have an answer for that. I'm just here to complain about it."

A group of more than a dozen advocates additionally asked the State and Local Tax Review task force to remove the 7 percent sales tax from menstrual products.

Taxes costing poor Hoosiers more?

The two-year tax force is scrutinizing Indiana's tax system in hopes of proposing legislation for 2025's budget session.

And it's putting particular focus on the feasibility of eliminating the individual income tax, which experts have testified could increase reliance on the sales tax and other sources of state income.

Prosperity Indiana Policy Director Andrew Bradley said poorer residents are paying a greater percentage of their incomes toward taxes.

"Income disparities are wider after we apply state and local taxes," he said. "This is in part because the lowest-income 20 percent of Hoosier taxpayers face a state and local tax rate 115 percent higher than the top 1 percent of Hoosier households."

Indiana is among 44 states whose tax systems worsen economic inequality, according to the latest edition of a report Prosperity Indiana co-released Tuesday.

"(For) our partners in the human services sector — who work everyday with Hoosiers

who are living paycheck-to-paycheck — the state and local tax system actually pushes those budgets closer to the breaking point," Bradley said.

The report found that poor Hoosiers would pay even greater shares of their income if Indiana were to ditch its individual income tax and replace half the revenue with a sales tax expansion.

Bradley commended the state for excluding groceries from the sales tax and for offering an earned income tax credit, but asked the task force to "do no harm" to poor residents or cash-strapped local governments.

He additionally recommended consideration of a child tax credit, among other changes, and said the task force should consult with organizations who work with impoverished residents.

About six in 10 American adults are "very bothered" by the idea that some corporations and wealthy residents are not paying their "fair share" in taxes, said Erin Macey, director of the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute. She cited an April survey by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center.

Opposing views on sales tax, business personal property tax

National Conference of State Legislatures Senior Policy Specialist Eric Syverson said state sales tax efforts — including Indiana's — generally "don't live up to the ideal" of taxing all final consumption.

Syverson said that consumers are increasingly buying services, which aren't subject to Indiana sales taxes. People are purchasing more digital versions of products that used to be tangible, and are shopping online more. Governments have struggled to get foreign e-commerce companies to comply with sales tax requirements, he said.

Small businesses spoke out against that prospect.

The National Federation of Independent Businesses regularly surveys members in statewide ballots for their positions on legislative proposal. Indiana State Director Natalie Robinson said 90 percent of respondents

to Indiana's ballot opposed expanding the sales tax to services.

When survey-takers asked if they'd support that expansion in exchange for the elimination of the individual income tax — most small businesses are pass-through entities that pay this tax — Robinson said her group still got back mixed responses.

"Some owners were conflicted when asked if it would be a fair trade-off," she said. But, "the consensus from our membership was that state income tax is still the single most burdensome tax for small employers."

But members strongly supported eliminating the business personal property tax.

Hoosier businesses must pay taxes on property unless their possessions all cost below \$80,000. The property cannot be assessed at less than 30 percent of its initial cost, which is known as the 30 percent floor.

"Many small business owners tell us that they're paying more to actually prepare the tax return than the actual amount that's collected," Robinson said of this tax.

But eliminating the tax could have "extreme impacts" in some parts of the state, said the Association of Indiana Counties' Ryan Hoff — and minor impacts elsewhere. It depends, he said, on whether communities are manufacturing-intensive or mostly residential.

Accelerate Indiana Municipalities said it wanted the state to find a way to replace that lost income for local units if lawmakers choose to cut or get rid of the tax.

The Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce said it continued to support lowering the business personal property tax, but noted that the tax was not "top of mind for folks looking to relocate to Indiana." The organization said it supported income replacement.

Other witnesses said that, to attract more

residents, lawmakers should focus more on quality of life and jobs than on lowering taxes.

"There is a positive relationship between reducing the state income taxes and increased migration, but it's a modest effect (with a) finite impact — we can only reduce our rates to zero," said Indiana Association of Realtors CEO Mark Fisher. "... People are drawn across state lines to more dynamic economies, better job and wage opportunities."

'Luxury' menstrual products and next steps

Sen. Shelli Yoder, D-Indianapolis led a group of nine witnesses and more supporters to testify in support of removing the 7 percent sales tax from menstrual products.

MADVoters Indiana Co-Founder Chelsea McDonnell told lawmakers of how she grew up impoverished with unstable housing.

Emotionally, she recalled the first time her menstrual cycle hit, and how she thought she'd "done something wrong." The toilet paper she'd stuffed in her underwear did nothing to prevent the blood from soaking through her pants by the time the bus arrived at school.

"Because of the love and support from high school nurses, counselors and a few friends ... I was able to access the menstrual devices I needed — sometimes," McDonnell said. "When I couldn't access them, I stayed home."

"Poverty comes with restrictions you can't ever imagine unless you have lived through it," she added.

Yoder herself has authored a bill removing the tax, but Republican leaders have indicated they're unlikely to make any changes until the task force finishes its work.

The task force will next meet in April.

Donald Trump defies judge, gives courtroom speech on tense final day of New York civil fraud trial

By **MICHAEL R. SISA** and **JENNIFER PELTZ**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Barred from giving a formal closing argument, Donald Trump wrested an opportunity to speak in court at the conclusion of his New York civil fraud trial Thursday, unleashing a barrage of attacks in a six-minute diatribe before being cut off by the judge.

In an extraordinary move for any defendant, Trump not only sought to make his own summation but then brushed past a question from the judge about whether he would follow rules requiring him to keep his remarks focused on matters related to the trial.

"I am an innocent man," Trump protested. "I'm being persecuted by someone running for office, and I think you have to go outside the bounds."

Judge Arthur Engoron let him continue almost uninterrupted for what amounted to a brief personal summation, then cut him off for a scheduled lunch break.

Trump's in-court remarks, which were not televised, ensured a tumultuous final day for a trial over allegations that he habitually exaggerated his wealth on financial statements, deceiving a bank and insurance companies into giving him plum deals.

Engoron said he hoped to have a verdict by Jan. 31. He is deciding the case because state law doesn't allow for juries in this type of lawsuit.

New York Attorney General Letitia James sued Trump in 2022 under a state law that gives her broad power to investigate allegations of persistent fraud in business dealings. She wants the judge to impose \$370 million in penalties and forbid Trump from doing business in New York.

Adding to the day's tension, the exchanges took place hours after authorities responded to a bomb threat at the judge's house in New York City's suburbs. The scare didn't delay the start of court proceedings, and Engoron didn't mention it in court.

Trump, the leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination, has disparaged Engoron through-

out the trial, accusing him in a social media post Wednesday night of working closely with James. Both she and Engoron are Democrats.

The court action came days before the presidential primary season kicks off with the Monday's Iowa caucuses.

Engoron had rejected an unusual plan by Trump to deliver his own closing remarks in the courtroom, in addition to summations from his legal team. The sticking point was that Trump's lawyers would not agree to the judge's demand that he stick to "relevant" matters and not try to introduce new evidence, make a campaign speech or lob personal attacks at the judge, James or the court system.

After three Trump lawyers delivered traditional closing arguments Thursday, one of them, Christopher Kise, asked the judge again whether Trump could speak. Engoron asked Trump whether he would abide by the guidelines.

Trump didn't agree to do so, instead launching into his remarks.

"What's happened here, sir, is a fraud on me," Trump said, claiming he was being targeted by officials who "want to make sure I don't win again." He later accused the judge of not listening to him: "I know this is boring to you."

"Control your client," Engoron warned Kise.

Engoron then told Trump he had a minute left, let him speak a little more, and then adjourned.

James later said she wasn't bothered by Trump's personal attacks.

"This case has never been about politics or personal vendetta or about name-calling," she said outside court. "This case is about the facts and the law. And Mr. Donald Trump violated the law."

A lawyer for her office, Kevin Wallace, had argued in court that "fraud was central to the operation" of Trump's business. Wallace asserted that inflating Trump's fortune led to interest rate savings that "kept the company afloat" for a time when it was spending big on various projects, though Kise objected that there was no testimony to that effect.

The state insisted that the falsehoods were intentional and that Trump should be held accountable for them.

"Ask yourself: Would any of this persistent fraud have happened, over the course of 11 years, if it wasn't directed from the top by Mr. Trump?" state lawyer Andrew Amer posited during summations.

Trump skipped the state's closing arguments to hold a news conference that served as counter-programming. He reiterated his insistence that "they have no case."

His lawyers had argued as much in their summations. Kise said Trump "should get a medal" for his business acumen instead of a potential punishment he deemed the "corporate death penalty."

While he acknowledged that Trump's financial statements may have made "immaterial" overstatements about some of his holdings, the lawyer maintained that many assets "were undervalued by substantial sums."

The day began with police on Long Island checking out what they called a "swatting incident" at Engoron's home. Nassau County police said they found nothing amiss.

The false report came days after a fake emergency call reporting a shooting at the home of the judge in Trump's Washington, D.C., criminal case. The incidents are among a recent spate of similar false reports at the homes of public officials.

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